

January 26, 2011

Representative Gary MacLaren
State of Montana House of Representatives
Chairman, Local Government Committee
Helena, Montana

Dear Chairman MacLaren:

I would like to offer the following letter as testimony to House Bill 231, AN ACT REVISING REQUIREMENTS FOR FIRE DEPARTMENTS IN CITIES AND TOWNS, introduced by House Member Mr. Randy Brodehl, scheduled for January 27th, 2011.

Please note that I am an elected official on The City of Kalispell's City Council. My opinion in this letter does not represent the views or opinions of the City of Kalispell staff or its elected officials. My opinions and views are a result of my experiences as an elected official. I am presenting this testimony as a citizen.

I have been faced on a regular basis dealing with the financial struggles our community has with the funding of fire protection and other city services. The costs to pay for these services are enormous and take a very large part of our budget to support. The payments for trucks, equipment and wages do not come cheap. As we all know, fire protection for our citizen's and business's properties must be provided. That is a fact and cannot be debated. This is what civilized and advanced societies do. However, how cities fund and provide that protection should not be mandated by the state. As a businessman I am very familiar with how our government regulations constrict and control "out of the box" solutions to common everyday issues. This bill sponsored by Representative Brodehl will allow the creative minds in our cities another tool in the tool box to continue to provide top notch fire protection with a smaller impact to the community members and their financial well being.

You will most likely receive resistance from the Fire Fighter's Union to not support this bill. Please remember that the Fire Fighter's Union is not responsible for providing Fire Protection Services to a city. The city and its elected officials are. The Fire Fighter's Union is also not the responsible entity for paying for fire protection services. The city and its elected officials are. Cities and their elected officials have an obligation to their residents and taxpayers to provide the best fire protection available while being as fiscally responsible to the taxpayers as possible. Fire protection must be paid for within the fiscal means of the city and ultimately the fiscal means of its taxpayers. This bill sponsored by Representative Brodehl will assist cities in providing the best fire protection and emergency services as fiscally possible.

Please note that current Montana Law allows for Volunteer Reserve Police Officers in our Class 1 cities. (MCA 7-23-211) These volunteer police officers are un-paid officers who assist paid police officers. This program is proven to work and provides additional high quality police services at a very low cost. Volunteer fire fighters could do the same.

When I lived in Japan during the 1990's I remember being a part of the city's volunteer fire fighter effort during the new year season. I lived in an incorporated city of 18,000 residents (the equivalent of a class 1 city in Montana) with a full time paid fire department. Our duties as volunteers was to assist the fire department in keeping residents safe and aware of house fires during the holiday season. This volunteer service provided a safety net of service at no expense to the city and was greatly appreciated by the city's residents and paid fire department. Volunteers were also available to assist the fire department personnel when emergencies occurred requiring additional manpower.

I have also attended Fire Opps 101, a training program provided by IAFF. This program provides elected officials the opportunity to spend a day as a firefighter and rescue worker. This was a great program that allowed me to understand the job these public servants do. I do respect the work they do every day for our communities.

As you know, all residents of our state and cities deserve more efficient ways to fund and provide local services. This bill provides an additional way without infringing on the rights of any persons or organizations and eliminates an unfunded mandate by the state.

I ask the committee to support this bill and move it to the house floor for votes.

Sincerely,
Tim Kluesner
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